THE HISTORIC SENSE IN EIGHTEENTH CENTURY ENGLISH LITERATURE

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE BOARD OF UNIVERSITY STUDIES OF THE JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY IN CONFORMITY WITH THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

1935

BY

FRANCES SCHOULER MILLER

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RESUMÉ

This dissertation deals with the historic sense in eighteenth-century English literature, or rather with the eighteenth-century Englishman's sense of the national, rather than the classical, past. The first chapter, using eighteenth-century magazines and letters as evidence, suggests psychological, historical, practical reasons why the historic sense developed in the eighteenth century and points out parallel manifestations of the historic sense in historiography and the fine arts. The next chapters treat three poets important both for their distinctive approach to the past and for their frequent treatment of it: Thomas Gray, whose Celtic and Norse interests are revealed chiefly in poetry and whose other antiquarian interests—architectural and literary, English and French—are shown in his letters and miscellaneous papers; Thomas Warton, whose critical, scholarly, and poetical efforts are the subject of this extract, and the third Thomas, the boy Chatterton, whose lifelike medieval dream-world, whose imitation medieval language, and genuine poetic gifts make the *Rowley Poems* unique both as medievalism and as poetry. Minor historical verse, repetitious, imitative, dull, is shown in the fifth chapter to be somewhat more historical than poetical. Generally in harmony with neo-classical tenets and practice, it is at times in mild rebellion against eighteenth-century ideas, both literary and non-literary. The sixth chapter on historical drama is divided into two parts: the first studies by chronological and statistical tables the drama dealing with history; the second investigates the influence of traditional and contemporary drama, of history, and of eighteenth-century ideology on historical plays. Usually traditional and contemporary dramatic conventions, and eighteenth-century ideas and emotions triumph over historicity, though the producer made some progress in the authentic costuming of his cast and the setting of his stage, and the dramatist in the historical atmosphere of his lines. The psychological anachronism persists in drama and minor historical poetry alike. The concluding chapter no more than suggests the effect of the historical sense on criticism and

scholarship and outlines further work to be done; it points out the limitations of the historic sense as developed by the eighteenth century and defines rather negatively the nature of that development. For it was not large enough to be called a *movement* like the Romantic Movement nor was it yet inextricably linked with the Romantic Movement, for it survived the decline of the Romantic Movement to become, as far as one can judge, a permanent element in the human mind.

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THE HISTORIC SENSE OF THOMAS WARTON, JUNIOR

By Frances Schouler Miller

Thomas Warton was a poet-antiquary—perhaps the foremost of the eighteenth century—whose observations and editions, literary history and verse were dominated by the historic sense. It was his love of the past that led him down the winding ways of antiquity to discuss the early history of English letters, to defend both antiquarianism and scholarship and the apparent irreverence and naïve anachronisms of the medieval writers, and to sing of abbeys and castles, of minstrels and tourneys.

What briefly is the historic sense? It is, perhaps, most significantly the realization that men of the past were unlike those of the present in manners and customs, in dress and in dwellings, in religious feeling and modes of thought, a realization usually accompanied by a sympathetic rather than a superior attitude toward the past. It is not simply the interest in the past that is almost as old as history itself, but the interest in the "differentness" of the past; not merely the critical sense of the historian that enables him to evaluate documents and to weigh evidence, but the ability of artist, play-producer or layman that enables him to judge an early work of art as a product of the times in which and of the taste for which it was created.

To Thomas Warton in particular the conviction that

> Nor rough nor barren are the winding ways
> Of hoar antiquity but strown with flowers

was the faith behind much of his work. That his love of medieval antiquity was an early and continuous passion the following list of antiquarian poetry and prose will show.

Date	Age	Work
1745	17	Pleasures of Melancholy (published 1747)
1749	21	Triumph of Isis
1750	22	Description of Winchester
1751	23	Ode for Music
1753	25	The Union (includes selections from the elder English and Scottish poets together with Warton's "Ode on the Approach of Summer" and "Pastoral in the Manner of Spenser")

1754	25	Observations on the *Fairy Queen* of Spenser
1755	26	Verses Written in a Blank Leaf of Mr. Warton's *Observations* on Spenser [1]
1761	33	On the Marriage of the King
1762	34	Observations on the *Fairy Queen* of Spenser
		On the Birth of the Prince of Wales
1774	46	History of English Poetry, Vol. 1
1777	49	Poems
1778	50	History of English Poetry, vol. 2
1781	53	History of English Poetry, vol. 3
1782	54	Verses on Reynolds' Painted Window
		Specimen of a History of Oxfordshire
		Enquiry into the Antiquity of Poems Attributed to Thomas Rowley
1785	57	Edition of Milton's Minor Poems [2] (2nd ed. 1791)
		Ode for the New Year, 1786
1786	58	Ode for the New Year, 1787
1787	59	Birthday Ode, 1787
1788	60	Birthday Ode, 1788
Died May 21, 1790 (Essay on Gothic Architecture posthumously published in Collection by Warton, Bentham, Grose, Milner, 1800) [3]		

It is significant that no chronological division can be made between Warton's creative and critical activities. He was writing and publishing poetry simultaneously with his observations, histories, and editions. And all his writing was influenced by his historical sense. His criticism, for example, was less of the judicial type and more that of the literary historian. Rambling and digressive antiquary that he was, Thomas Warton had little interest in the fundamental problems of criticism. He had no theories to propound of the nature of tragedy,[4] of the connection of life with literature, of the relation of art to morality, to utility, to truth. In discussing those "isms" to-day termed romanticism, classicism, realism, primitivism, and humanism, Warton made statements that are either contradictory [5] or too general and indefinite to be attacked. He pointed

[1] See my article, "Did Thomas Warton Borrow from Himself?" *MLN* 51 (1936). 151-4.

[2] The full notes on folk lore and romance make this an antiquarian work.

[3] I am indebted to Professor Raymond Havens for much of this analysis.

[4] The nearest approach is in his *History of English Poetry*, ed. 1824, 4. 185. Hereafter I use the abbreviation *HEP*, and references are to the 1824 edition.

[5] *Ibid.* 3. 269, 284-86; 4. 325-26, 327-28.

out beauties rather than faults, he admired rather than analyzed. Interested in particulars, his forte was explaining individual passages and tracing parallels. His important use of the comparative method [6] is more to his credit as literary historian than as critic.

It is, however, precisely because of his essentially historical approach to criticism that Warton's literary history is so interesting as an exhibition of the historic sense. Indeed, his writing a history of poetry at all is significant. Before the eighteenth century there had not even been an attempt.[7] Two poets before Warton—Pope and Gray—had each drawn up a sketch of English poetry by the " schools " method, but neither went farther than the outline.[8] That Warton wrote his as an historical development of poetry shows him in line with the growing eighteenth-century interest in the writing of histories; that he abandoned the " schools " method in favor of the freer " exertion of research " [9] exhibits his open-mindedness as a scholar.

Similarly striking is the national, almost nationalistic, aspect of the *History of English Poetry*. Warton tried to begin his history with the birth of the English national character.[10] That he began with the wrong period, the eleventh century, as more scholarly scholars from Ritson [11] on have made clear, is immaterial for this discussion. What is significant is that Warton as an Englishman wrote a *History of English Poetry* and not a history of the poetry written in English. One doubts if Gray could have written his history of poetry with so much national feeling.

[6] Clarissa Rinaker, *Thomas Warton: A Biographical and Critical Study*, University of Illinois Studies, Urbana, 1916, 2. 125.

[7] Nichol Smith (" Warton's *History of English Poetry*," *Proc. of the British Academy* 15, 1929, 14-5) mentions the essay " Of the Old English Poets and Poetry " prefaced to the publication of the " Nut Brown Maid " in *The Muses Mercury* in 1707 as " the first attempt at a popular account of our poetry." About 1740 *The Polite Correspondence, or Rational Amusement*, a series of letters, discusses a scheme for writing a complete history of English poetry and gives verse renderings from the Anglo-Saxon, Welsh, and Danish. Hume was the first to include in a history selections from the great English writers.

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 16.

[9] *HEP*, Preface, 1. (7).

[10] *Ibid.* 1. (4), (8).

[11] *Observations on the Three First Volumes of " The History of English Poetry,"* London, 1782, pp. 2-3.

In a second way Warton's literary history exhibits the historic sense; it is essentially antiquarian. Like an antiquary, he usually ignores aesthetic values. Specifically, he shows great interest in literature as a picture of early manners and customs. In Lyndesay's *Deith of Quene Magdalene* he points out:

> Exclusive of this artificial and very poetical mode of introducing a description of these splendid spectacles, instead of saying plainly that the queen's death prevented the superb ceremonies which would have attended her coronation, these stanzas have another merit, that of transmitting the ideas of the times in the exhibition of a royal entertainment.[12]

Of the *Life of Saynt Werburge* he writes:

> The most splendid passage of this poem, is the following description of the feast made by King Ulpher in the hall of the abbey of Ely, when his daughter Werburgh was admitted to the veil in that monastery. Among other curious anecdotes of antient manners, the subjects of the tapestry, with which the hall was hung, and of the songs sung by the minstrels, on this solemn occasion, are given at large.[13]

Such antiquarian interest has definite results. It means enlarging the definition of literature to include any document which, regardless of its aesthetic merits, tells us of the life and habits of our ancestors. In his Preface to the *History of English Poetry* Warton wrote:

> But a history of poetry . . . [besides showing the dawn of the national genius] . . . must be more especially productive of entertainment and utility. I mean, as it is an art, whose object is human society: as it has the peculiar merit, in its operations on that object, of faithfully recording the features of the times, and of preserving the most picturesque and expressive representations of manners: and, because the first monuments of composition in every nation are those of the poet, as it possesses the additional advantage of transmitting to posterity genuine delineations of life in its simplest stages. Let me add, that anecdotes of the rudiments of a favourite art will always be particularly pleasing.[14]

This constitutes an oblique thrust at absolute criticism, which judges literature solely by its aesthetic merits and not by its historical values. At all events, such a statement is not con-

[12] *HEP* 3. 142. [13] *Ibid.* 3. 17. [14] *Ibid.* 1. (4).

gruent with the narrower neo-classical conception of literature. Not that Warton was particularly conscious of the implications. If we take his Preface literally, he, too, was more interested in " finished productions " of poetry,[15] by which he undoubtedly meant the polished literature of the eighteenth century, than in the rudimentary verse picturing a more primitive society.

Warton's historic sense enabled him to be tolerant of anachronisms. That is, his knowledge of the past helped him to detect flaws in the historical coloring of a piece of literature,[16] while his historic sense at the same time made him realize that the naïve handling of the classical past constituted part of the charm and flavor of medieval literature. He notes:

> We have frequent opportunities of observing, how the poets of these times engraft the manners of chivalry on antient classical history. In the following lines Alexander's education is like that of Sir Tristram. He is taught tilting, hunting, and hawking.[17]

And again:

> Among the anachronistic improprieties which . . . [Lydgate's version of the Troy story] contains . . . the most conspicuous is the fiction of Hector's sepulchre, or tomb: which also merits our attention for another reason, as it affords us an opportunity of adding some other notices of the modes of antient architecture to those already mentioned. The poet from Colonna supposes, that Hector was buried in the principal church of Troy, near the high altar, within a magnificent oratory, erected for that purpose, exactly resembling the Gothic shrines of our cathedrals, yet charged with many romantic decorations. . . . To complete the work, Priam founds a regular chantry of priests, whom he accommodates with mansions near the church, and endows with revenues, to sing in this oratory for the soul of his son Hector.[18]

His enjoyment of " anachronistic improprieties " appears in the remark:

> It is pleasant to observe the strange mistakes which Gower, a man of great learning, and the most general scholar of his age, has committed in this poem, concerning books which he never saw, his violent anachronisms, and misrepresentations of the most common facts and characters. . . . We smile, when Hector in Shakespeare quotes Aristotle: but Gower gravely informs his reader, that Ulysses

[15] *Ibid.* 1. (5).
[16] *HEP* 2. 397-8.
[17] *Ibid.* 2. 57.
[18] *Ibid.* 2. 405.

was a *clerke*, accomplished with a knowledge of all the sciences, a great rhetorician and magician: that he learned rhetoric of Tully, magic of Zoroaster, astronomy of Ptolomy, philosophy of Plato, divination of the prophet Daniel, proverbial instruction of Solomon, botany of Macer, and medicine of Hippocrates.[19]

But Warton's historic sense had a more vital effect on his methods: his knowledge of past times enabled him to use non-literary material in treating the history of literature. In the *Observations* he learned to show the relationship of what the poet sees to what he feels and writes, in other words, the effect of environment. The "source material" of history (contemporary chronicles, travel literature, and letters) he used to explain everything from Spenser's gardens and interior decorations to his choice of allegorical personages and the reality of chivalric conventions in the *Faerie Queen*. Again, as a proof of the popularity of certain motifs in romance, Warton uses what might be called the "archeological" evidence of tapestries.[20] The novelty of Warton's method here should not be underestimated; this is not the more common comparison of poetry and of painting or the realization of "the necessary connection between literary composition and the arts of design."[21] Or, to explain the effect of St. Paul's Cathedral on Milton, he writes—in words that we cannot forbear quoting (as Warton himself would say) for the contrast to his utterance on Reynolds' painted window:

> Old saint Paul's cathedral, from Hollar's valuable plates in Dugdale, appears to have been a most stately and venerable pattern of the Gothic style. Milton was educated at saint Paul's school, contiguous to the church; and thus became impressed with an early reverence for the solemnities of antient ecclesiastical architecture, its vaults, shrines, iles, pillars, and painted glass, rendered yet more aweful by the accompaniment of the choral service. Does the present modern church convey these feelings? Certainly not. We justly admire and approve Sir Christopher Wren's Grecian proportions. Truth and propriety gratify the judgment, but they do not affect the imagination.[22]

[19] *Ibid.* 2. 324-5.

[20] *Observations on the Fairy Queen of Spenser*, 1762, 1. 176; hereafter I use the abbreviation *Obs.*

[21] *HEP* 3. 238.

[22] *Milton's Minor Poems* (1791), p. 91.

The most important critical result of Warton's historic sense is his historical point of view. The contention of Miss Rinaker, that Thomas Warton was the first to use the historical point of view, Dr. Sheppard and Dr. Havens have refuted. Dr. Sheppard has shown that the historical view point was a recognized method of criticism long before Thomas Warton busied himself with the *Fairie Queen* or made hit-or-miss translations of Middle English manuscripts;[23] Dr. Havens has demonstrated that Warton in applying the historical point of view to his criticism of the plan and structure of the *Fairie Queen* was not at all consistent.[24] With all Warton's limitations as a historical critic adequately discussed by these two scholars, it remains to point out that Warton practically stumbled on the historical point of view. As a comparison of the two editions of the *Observations* will show, Warton read more widely in Spenser's predecessors, and contemporaries between the first edition of 1754 and the second of 1762. In the latter Warton constantly explains Spenser's choice of incidents as indebtedness to the general romance tradition rather than to specific authors.[25] Especially impressed by the persistent popularity of Arthurian romance in Elizabethan England, he explained that it had influenced Spenser's subject matter far more than the eighteenth century realized.[26] His "track of reading" had broadened in another direction too—that of Spenser's Italian models. By 1762 Warton could recognize a reference to the "pearls" and "corals" of a lady's teeth and lips as common to the "italian poets" rather than a direct borrowing from Ariosto.[27] Although he could by no means approve whole-heartedly the plan and conduct of the *Faerie Queen* and perhaps even wished Spenser's bosom brought "back to truth again," he realized—and made his readers realize—that the example of Tasso and Ariosto had influenced Spenser's method tremendously.[28]

[23] Odell Sheppard, "Thomas Warton and the Historical Point of View in Criticism," *JEGP* 16 (1917). 161.

[24] Raymond D. Havens, "Thomas Warton and the Eighteenth-Century Dilemma," *SP* 25 (1928). 36-50.

[25] *Obs.* (1762), 1. 17, 27, 54-5, 65, 224; 2. 123-4, 128-9, 139, 198.

[26] *Ibid.* 1. 25-7, 187-8.

[27] *Obs.* (1762), 2. 46. Cf. *Obs.* (1754), p. 184.

[28] *Obs.* (1762), 1. 224; 2. 268-9.

Having widened his "track of reading," Warton began to formulate certain doctrines of literary history. It is necessary, he insisted, to study a poet's predecessors and contemporaries in order to understand the poet himself.

> And here it may be observ'd, that in criticising upon Milton, Johnson, Spenser, and some other of our elder poets, not only a competent knowledge of all antient classical learning is requisite, but also an acquaintance with those books, which, though now forgotten and lost, were yet in repute about the time in which each author respectively wrote, and which it is most likely he had red.[29]

Warton practised what he preached with especial thoroughness in his edition of Milton's *Minor Poems*, the footnotes to which are chiefly citations of parallel passages from Milton's less-known predecessors and contemporaries. By the application of this doctrine, too, he showed the relationship between the pastoral portions of the *Fairie Queen* and Sidney's *Arcadia*,—in fact, the whole Elizabethan pastoral fashion.[30] Now it was the application of this idea that so impressed Warton's contemporaries. Dr. Johnson wrote a well-known letter praising the method;[31] an unknown correspondent commended it in a letter to the *Gentleman's Magazine* published earlier than Johnson's;[32] Hurd also praised the method.[33] These letters, incidentally, throw light on Miss Rinaker's contention that Thomas Warton was one of the original exponents of the historical point of view.[34] It is not the viewpoint itself that Warton's contemporaries praise as new but the application of the historical point of view to the methods of literary scholarship. Not the critical theorists but the practical editors and scholars applauded.

There is, indeed, little doubt that Warton enjoyed finding out parallels or that he became increasingly absorbed in the

[29] *Obs.* (1754), p. 243.

[30] *Obs.* (1762), 1. 217-9.

[31] James Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, ed. G. B. Hill, revised L. F. Powell, Oxford, 1934, 1. 270-1.

[32] *Gent. Mag.* 28: 57-8. See my article, "Did Thomas Warton Borrow from Himself," *MLN* 51. (March, 1936), 151-4.

[33] *The Correspondence of Richard Hurd and William Mason and Letters of Richard Hurd to Thomas Gray*, ed. E. H. Pearce. Reedited Leonard Whibley, Cambridge, 1932, p. 37, note 5.

[34] *Thomas Warton*, p. 43.

" manners and customs " aspect of history and of literature. Soon he discovered for himself the theory of milieu. This theory, closely allied to his application of the historical point of view to scholarship, postulates that a poet should be studied in relation to his environment and his era, not in a critical vacuum. For example, Warton explained the " platonic cast " of Spenser's " Hymns of Heavenly Love and Beauty " by the interest of Spenser's friend Sidney and others in the system of Plato.[35] More concretely, the " emblematical personages " of Elizabethan shows and spectacles tempted Spenser, said he, as much as the example of Ariosto to write an allegorical poem.[36] Or, to take a more trivial instance, à propos of Milton's and Spenser's references to tapestry, Warton moralized thus:

> As the general fashion of furnishing halls, and grand apartments, is at present entirely different from this, the reader passes over the expression, TAPESTRY-HALLS, without feeling any striking idea of the thing conveyed to him, because the object from whence it is drawn, does not at present commonly exist: and we may observe, from this passage, how much of their force and propriety both expressions and descriptions must necessarily lose, when the objects, or customs, or manners, to which they allude, are disused, and forgotten.[37]

His most general statement of the theory of milieu follows:

> In reading the works of a poet who lived in a remote age, it is necessary that we should look back upon the customs and manners which prevailed in that age. We should endeavour to place ourselves in the writer's situation and circumstances. Hence we shall become better enabled to discover, how his turn of thinking, and manner of composing, were influenced by familiar appearances and established objects, which are utterly different from those with which we are at present surrounded. For want of this caution, too many readers view the knights and damsels, the tournaments and enchantments, of Spenser, with modern eyes; never considering that the encounters of chivalry subsisted in our author's age; that romances were then most eagerly and universally studied; and that consequently Spenser, from the fashion of the times, was induced to undertake a recital of chivalrous atchievements, and to become, in short, a ROMANTIC POET.[38]

[35] *Obs.* (1762), 1. 87-8.
[36] *Ibid.* 2. 89-92.
[37] *Ibid.* (1762), 2. 230-1.
[38] *Ibid.* 2. 87-8.

This passage also shows that the historical point of view as exemplified in Warton was not cold theory but practice. His was a reconstruction of the past requiring two faculties: accurate historical knowledge and sympathetic imagination. This theory is also the converse of his recognition that any writing is literature that gives us a picture of old manners. Old literature helps one to a knowledge of " ancient manners " and a knowledge of " ancient manners " is necessary to the understanding of the elder poets. Perhaps then it was his original antiquary's interest in medieval poetry as a reflection of medieval life that enabled Warton to state his theory of milieu.

For the historical point of view and its corollary, the theory of milieu, Warton had still another use. By these valuable critical principles he could justify what he liked but felt contemporary taste would not approve, for example, Spenser's imaginative but unorthodox use of ancient fable and mythology.[39] Warton was not entirely satisfied with the plan of the *Faerie Queen,* yet his understanding of Spenser's contemporaries and era prevented a wholesale condemnation.[40] Finally in the *History of English Poetry* he used the historical point of view to explain what he thoroughly disapproved, apparent irreverence and obscenity.

> It is in an enlightened age only that subjects of scripture history would be supported with proper dignity. But then an enlightened age would not have chosen such subjects for theatrical exhibition. It is certain that our ancestors intended no sort of impiety by these monstrous and unnatural mixtures. . . . They had no just idea of decorum, consequently but little sense of the ridiculous: what appears to us to be the highest burlesque, on them would have made no sort of impression.[41]

Or again:

> Not that I mean to palliate the levity of the story [" The Miller's Tale "], which was most probably chosen by Chaucer in compliance with the prevailing manners of an unpolished age, and agreeable to ideas of festivity not always the most delicate and refined. Chaucer abounds in liberties of this kind, and this must be his apology.[42]

[39] *Obs.* (1762), 1. 66.
[40] *Obs.* (1762), 1. 15-6.
[41] *HEP* 2. 76.
[42] *Ibid.* 2. 258.

Warton, in short, used the historical point of view not only to explain what he did like, but to explain away what he did not like.

In spite of his occasional cavalier references to antiquaries,[43] Thomas Warton was very much of an antiquarian. What is more, he defended antiquarianism—again by the historical point of view. This valuable critical principle served not only to justify the ways of Spenser by the analogy of ancient literature but to justify the by-ways of Thomas Warton's interest in old manners and customs. At the end of the second edition of the *Observations* he wrote:

> Mechanical critics will perhaps be disgusted at the liberties I have taken in introducing so many anecdotes of antient chivalry. But my subject required frequent proofs of this sort. Nor could I be persuaded that such enquiries were, in other respects, either useless or ridiculous; as they tended at least, to illustrate an institution of no frivolous or indifferent nature. . . .
> I am still further to hope, that, together with other specimens of obsolete literature in general, hinted at before, the many references I have made, in particular to Romances, the necessary appendage of antient Chivalry, will also plead their pardon. For however monstrous and unnatural these compositions may appear to this age of reason and refinement, they merit more attention than the world is willing to bestow. They preserve many curious historical facts, and throw considerable light on the nature of the feudal system. *They are the pictures of antient usages and customs; and represent the manners, genius, and character of our ancestors.*[44]

Finally, Warton uses the assumption that it is necessary to study contemporary authors and customs to illustrate an old English classic (in short, the historical point of view) in defense of scholarship. In a vigorous passage added in the second edition of the *Observations* he declared:

> Pope laughs at Theobald for giving us, in his edition of Shakespeare, a sample of
>
> "——— All such READING *as was never read.*"
>
> But these strange and ridiculous books which Theobald quoted, were unluckily the very books which Shakespeare himself had studied; the knowledge of which enabled that useful editor to

[43] *Ibid.* 2. 439; 3. 1.
[44] *Obs.* (1762), 2. 266-8. My italics.

explain so many difficult allusions and obsolete customs in his poet, which otherwise could never have been understood. For want of this sort of literature, Pope tells us that the DREADFUL SAGITTARY in *Troilus* and *Cressida*, signifies Teucer, so celebrated for his skill in archery. Had he deigned to consult an old history, called the DESTRUCTION OF TROY, a book which was the delight of Shakespeare and of his age, he would have found that this formidable archer, was no other than an imaginary beast, which the grecian army brought against Troy. *If Shakespeare is worth reading, he is worth explaining; and the researches used for so valuable and elegant a purpose, merit the thanks of genius and candour, not the satire of prejudice and ignorance.* That labour, which so essentially contributes to the service of true taste, deserves a more honourable repository than The TEMPLE of DULNESS.[45]

In sum, Warton's use of the historical point of view was pragmatic and " occasional." That is, he used it when he wanted to defend the plan of the *Faerie Queen*, to account for the seeming irreverence of his ancestors, or to justify the antiquarian nature of his own *Observations*. Since its use resulted less from theoretical conviction than from practical need, there is small wonder that at times he was inconsistent.

Self-evident as is Warton's love for antiquity, his conception of the past needs further discussion. For historical facts are more or less constant, but the selection of facts or generalizations on the basis of facts are variables, and the variations are wide from person to person and generation to generation. Warton, like most men of his time, believed in the progressive development of poetry; more questionable is the thoroughness with which he thought out his beliefs. Indubitably he found popery a more poetical religion than the reformed:

> The catholic worship, besides that its numerous exteriour appendages were of a picturesque and even of a poetical nature, disposed the mind to a state of deception, and encouraged, or rather authorised, every species of credulity: its visions, miracles, and legends, propagated a general propensity to the Marvellous, and strengthened the belief of spectres, demons, witches, and incantations. These illusions were heightened by churches of a wonderful mechanism, and constructed on such principles of inexplicable architecture as had a tendency to impress the soul with every false sensation of religious fear.[46]

[45] *Ibid.* 2. 264-5. My italics.

[46] *HEP* 3. 285.

He nearly berates Milton for his bitterness towards Catholicism, a bitterness that Warton disliked almost as much as the poet's republicanism. "No man was ever so disqualified to turn puritan," [47] he wrote, because Puritanism meant turning even farther away from the more poetic Catholicism. (This, a personal reaction of Warton, was not typical of the age; indeed, his brother Joseph thought him rather hard on Milton.) However condescendingly he might speak of its crudeness and irrationality, Warton undoubtedly found the whole medieval period more poetical than enlightened "modern" times.[48]

Nevertheless his common sense enabled him to avoid some of the pitfalls into which an indiscreet apologist for the past is likely to slip. Much as he hated to relinquish belief in the authenticity of Rowley's poems, Warton realized the dangers in valuing the old simply because it is old. Accordingly doubting Thomas declared of dubious Thomas:

> It is with regret that I find myself obliged to pronounce Rowlie's poems to be spurious. Antient remains of English poetry, unexpectedly discovered, and fortunately rescued from a long oblivion, are contemplated with a degree of fond enthusiasm: exclusive of any real or intrinsic excellence, they afford those pleasures, arising from the idea of antiquity, which deeply interest the imagination. With these pleasures we are unwilling to part. But there is a more solid satisfaction, resulting from the detection of artifice and imposture.[49]

By insisting that Spenser painted "real manners" [50] and that the moving castles of romance were founded on the instruments of war used in sieges during the Crusades,[51] Warton avoided the fairy-tale approach to the past made by many. On the other hand, he did show decided preference for the more "romantic" aspects of early English literature and life. Knightly legend, chivalry, and the gorgeous rather than the grim aspects of feudalism fascinated him; he paid little attention to realistic fabliau and satire, to bourgeois commerce and city life. One would never gather, for example, from the emphasis in Warton's criticism of Chaucer, especially in the *Observations*,[52] that

[47] *Milton's Minor Poems* (1785), p. 95.
[48] *Ibid.* 3. 284-6.
[49] *Ibid.* 2. 474.
[50] *Obs.* (1762), 2. 88.
[51] *HEP* 1. 72. Note.
[52] *Obs.* (1754), pp. 141-2; *Obs.* (1762), 1. 196-7.

Chaucer was a poet of realism who depicted the manners not only of the court but of all classes. Such, then, was Warton's attitude towards the past: now poetic, now prosiac, now regretful of its " pastness," now superior to its crudities.

His poetry also was influenced by his early historical interests; apparently an early visit to Windsor Castle was particularly influential on the future poet. Mant furnishes us in his " Memoirs " an anecdote from the Bishop of Gloucester:

> Dr. Joseph Warton . . . was accustomed to relate a circumstance, which though in itself apparently unimportant, yet, with respect to the writings of Mr. Thomas Warton, was perhaps in its effects of considerable importance. When they were both boys, their father took them to see Windsor Castle. The several objects presented to their view much engaged the attention, and excited the admiration, of the father and his son Joseph. As they were returning, the father with some concern said to Joseph, ' Thomas goes on, and takes no notice of any thing he has seen.' This remark was never forgotten by his son, who however in mature years made this reflection: ' I believe my brother was more struck with what he saw, and took more notice of every object, than either of us.' And there is good reason to think, that the peculiar fondness for *Castle Imagery,* which our Author on many occasions strongly discovers, may be traced to this incident of his early days.[53]

For Thomas Warton, *père*, the result was " Verses Written after Seeing Windsor Castle," a tidy little neo-classical poem with tame sentiments equivalent to " home-keeping hearts are happiest," from which one might gather the erroneous impression that the author cared as little for Windsor Castle and other antiquities as the majority of his home-staying contemporaries. The effect on Thomas Warton, *fils*, can be seen in his numerous descriptions of Windsor and other castles, though one must not, like the worthy bishop, attribute to one visit all Warton's castle " imagery."

A second influence, apparently, was home training. Whatever else was included in the diet and catechism of the Warton family, the two boys were early given an appreciation of Gothic architecture and the poetry of Spenser and Milton. From the younger Thomas Warton's approach to the poetry of Milton and his master Spenser, one might judge that these two loves

[53] Thomas Warton, *Poetical Works,* Oxford, 1802, ed. Richard Mant, 1. p. xxix.

may very well have reinforced his love for old poets, romances, and architecture. Perhaps long residence at Oxford helped to develop Warton's historic sense. There he lived with Gothic buildings; there he saw the survival of medieval customs; possibly the patrons and "famous alumni," especially Alfred and the Black Prince, influenced the subject matter of his poetry. His visits to his brother Joseph while the latter was headmaster of the school at Winchester, Alfred's capital and home of the Table Round, produced the sonnet on Arthur's Round Table and gave Warton access to old records utilized in the *History of English Poetry*.

When historians of poetry also write historical poems, these productions become doubly interesting. As one would expect of the man who began his history of English poetry with the eleventh century, there is in his own poetry less of pre-Conquest than of post-Conquest England. There is, however, some Celtic material: two references to Bonduca, occasional mention of bards and Druids, as well as a whole sonnet on Stonehenge; though Arthur is never an active character in any of Warton's poems, the Arthurian legend is frequently referred to. As for Anglo-Saxon history, there are numerous references to Alfred, explicable perhaps either by Alfred's reputed founding of Oxford and his connection with Warton's haunt at Winchester or by the natural admiration of any Englishman for a genuine hero.

Warton's far more numerous post-Conquest subjects include Windsor and other castles and Vale Royal Abbey for architecture; Henry II, Richard Coeur de Lion, Edward I and III, the Black Prince and Henry V for royalty; a Crusade and an expedition to Ireland for events. Warton has something to say about the medieval Catholic Church, minus its popes;[54] yet he makes but one medieval political reference (to Magna Carta), a deficiency surprising in a poet laureate.

> What time, pavilion'd on the neighbouring mead,
> Th' indignant Barons rang'd in bright array
> Their feudal bands, to curb despotic sway;
> And leagu'd a Briton's birthright to restore,
> From John's reluctant grasp the roll of freedom bore.[55]

[54] *Ibid.* 1. 99-103, 136-9.

[55] *Ibid.* 2. 118-9.

Likewise Warton omits the Ossianic sort of past, ultra-primitive, super-heroic; the bourgeois world painted by Chaucer; and medieval city life and commerce depicted by Chatterton.

How did Warton handle the historical subject matter he had chosen? One remembers Ker's statement that "the Middle Ages have influenced modern literature more strongly through their architecture than through their poems." [56] Certainly in Warton's poetry there is much—and very good—exact description of architecture. He had his eye on the object when he wrote of the "thousand torches" illumining "the vaulted roof" and "the lofty-window'd hall" hung with "storied tapestry" of Cilgarran Castle [57] or "the fretted nook," "the clustur'd column," and "windows, rang'd in long array" of Vale Royal Abbey.[58] Moreover, architectural, or at least archaeological, remains are frequent starting points for Warton's reconstruction of the past. Of the former type are the ode on Vale Royal Abbey and the verses on the birth of the Prince of Wales (which begin with Windsor Castle); of the latter, the sonnets on Stonehenge and King Arthur's Round Table. It is just as evident, however, that Warton is capable of giving the manners and customs, interiors and costumes belonging to the life lived in such abbeys or castles; he wrote as confidently of Windsor Castle's "proud Tilts, unmatch'd for hardy deeds" [59] as of the Castle itself, or of the Vale Royal Abbey, where

> the solitary minstrel came
> An honour'd guest, while the grim evening sky
> Hung lowering, and around the social flame
> Tun'd his bold harp to tales of chivalry.[60]

This ability to describe the life in the castle, though stimulated originally by first-hand experience of architectural "reliques," was probably derived in part from Warton's reading of romance. For example, a note of Mant à propos of

> The golden fans, that o'er the turrets strown,
> Quick-glancing to the sun, wild music made

shows that Warton in *The History of English Poetry* comments

[56] *CHEL* 10. 217.
[57] *Poetical Works*, 2. 53-4.
[58] *Ibid.* 1. 133, 136.
[59] *Ibid.* 1. 46.
[60] *Ibid.* 1. 137-8.

several times on such fans.[61] In " The Crusade " Warton uses the " moving castles " which in *The History of English Poetry* he insisted were not originally fictions of romantic poets but actual engines of war.[62] Thus it is entirely possible that Warton's reading of old literature colored the architectural details derived from first-hand observation. In other words, Thomas Warton's historical poetry results not merely from his interest in Gothic architecture but from his literary studies as well.

Whatever the source of his inspiration and background, Warton's portrayal of medieval people while not exact, is not so completely unconvincing as is that of some eighteenth-century plays dealing with the Middle Ages. King Richard on a Crusade, the bard who sings of Arthur's grave, and the hermit[64] are all sufficiently medieval not to be mistaken for moderns. Warton, however, never quite caught the fanaticism that lay behind two such different phases of religious feeling as the Crusades and extreme asceticism or the equal fervor of the Arthurian belief. But Warton, after all, whether dealing with nature or the past, with himself or others, was hardly a psychological poet.

In the third place, Warton demonstrates real ability to show in the same poem two " levels " of antiquity, the period of Henry II and that of King Arthur, an ability all the more surprising in view of the difficulty many of his contemporaries experienced in portraying accurately even one level of antiquity. To put it differently, Warton could show both past perfect and pluperfect when others could scarcely show the simple past tense. In " The Grave of King Arthur " Warton suggests the interval of time by references to the " ruthless Dane " and Henry's " Norman pike-men " as well as by direct mention of time and oblivion; he contrasts the time-setting of Henry's stately feast and meditated conquest of Ireland with Arthur bleeding beneath a Saxon spear and encountering a " paynim foe " admidst wild scenery reminiscent of " The Bard "—a far

[61] *Ibid.* 1. 131.

[62] *HEP* 1. 74, 72. Note.

[63] Warton, to be sure, made no use of medieval metres, nor did he attempt archaic diction approaching Chatterton's. He was not influenced, like Gray, by the directness and the absence of transition characteristic of ballads, or afflicted by medieval prolixity in telling a story.

[64] *Poetical Works*, 2. 38-50, 64-74; 1. 99-103.

more difficult task than simple " progress pieces " such as " Ode XIX " on poetry or the " Ode for Music."

To the past, or occasionally " pasts," Warton makes several approaches. The first, the retrospective, he uses in the " Ode on Vale Royal Abbey," where, by repeopling a ruined monastery, Warton creates a picture of monastic life in by-gone days. The second approach, the comparison of past with present or of present to past, appears in his laureate odes and, somewhat less obviously, in the complimentary poems on the marriage of the king and the birth of the prince. Finally, Warton exhibits the " historic-dramatic imagination." In his " Inscription on a Hermitage " the poet speaks directly in the person of the hermit; in " The Crusade " and " The Grave of King Arthur " the poem, without any preliminaries, assumes the time and place of action as silently as a play.

Warton's poetical handling of historical material continues to be notable throughout his work. Historical subject matter is found in his earliest known poem, the adolescent " Pleasures of Melancholy," and continues through his laureate odes. It appears in a nature poem, the " Ode on the Approach of Summer." Indeed, much as others use nature for their figures of speech, Warton uses historical tropes. Great imaginative power may not lie in such passages as:

> Again the lords of Albion's cultur'd plains
> March the firm leaders of their faithful swains;
> As erst stout archers, from the farm or fold,
> Flam'd in the van of many a baron bold.[65]

or

> Firm as the castle's feudal roof,
> Stands the Briton's social home.[66]

but they are certainly historical. Clio, in short, was the Muse who dictated, if not inspired, much of Warton's poetry.

In poetry as in criticism, Warton's attitude toward the past is not that of an extremist or fanatic. Although he loves ancient architecture and old manners, his common sense tells him he is better off in the world of to-day. Warton, indeed, suffered from a conflict similar to the eighteenth-century dilemma diagnosed by Dr. Havens. Not only did Warton waver between

[65] *Ibid.* 1. 33-4. [66] *Ibid.* 2. 95.

absolute and historical criticism, between Grecian and Gothic architecture;[67] he also could not make up his mind about the medieval past. Sometimes, as he thinks of the *Faerie Queen,* he grieves " that envious Time so soon o'er the lov'd strain had cast his dim disguise "; [68] sometimes he sees through his own illusion " of fair images of ancient things " that " the captive bard's obsequious mind beguiles," and dispels this illusion by the use of " severer Reason." [69] He could write with more sense than poetry of Vale Royal Abbey:

> From these deserted domes new glories rise;
> More useful institutes, adorning man,
> Manners enlarg'd, and new civilities,
> On fresh foundations build the social plan.
>
> Science, on ampler plume, a bolder flight
> Essays, escap'd from Superstition's shrine;
> While freed Religion, like primeval light
> Bursting from chaos, spreads her warmth divine.[70]

or of Windsor Castle:

> Then mourn not, Edward's Dome, thine ancient boast,
> Thy tournaments, and listed combats lost!
> From Arthur's Board, no more, proud castle, mourn
> Adventurous Valour's Gothic trophies torn!
> Those elfin charms, that held in magic night
> Its elder fame, and dimm'd its genuine light,
> At length dissolve in Truth's meridian ray. . . .[71]

Obviously Warton is in no danger of becoming a medieval neurasthenic like Miniver Cheevy.

Warton's historical poetry, then, is frequent, plentiful, though not always consistent. Is it original? Mant states flatly:

> In one department he is not only unequalled, but original and unprecedented: I mean in applying to modern poetry the embellishment of Gothic manners and Gothic arts; the tournaments and festivals, the poetry, music, painting, and architecture of " elder days." [72]

[67] Havens, " Thomas Warton and the Eighteenth-Century Dilemma," *SP* 25 (1928), 38-43, 46-50.

[68] *Poetical Works,* 1. 142.

[69] *Ibid.* 1. 138.

[70] *Ibid.* 1. 139.

[71] *Ibid.* 1. 53.

[72] *Ibid.* 1. clxi.

Warton's originality is relative but real. In the first place, Elizabethan topographical poetry, such as Drayton's *Polyolbion*, was definitely historical. So was Daniel's *Civil Wars*. Yet these minor Renaissance epics had died out, never to be revived. Besides, Mant refers to modern poetry, by which he meant no more than the eighteenth century, perhaps only the latter half. But even within this century Pope had used historical material. In " Windsor Forest " he wrote:

> Oh wouldst thou sing what heroes Windsor bore,
> What Kings first breathed upon her winding shore,
> Or raise old warriors, whose ador'd remains,
> In weeping vaults her hallow'd earth contains!
> With Edward's acts adorn the shining page,
> Stretch his long triumphs down thro' every age,
> Draw monarch's chain'd, and Cressi's glorious field,
> The lilies blazing on the regal shield. . . .
> Let softer strains ill-fated Henry mourn,
> And palms eternal flourish round his urn.
> Here o'er the martyr-king the marble weeps,
> And, fast beside him, once-fear'd Edward sleeps.
>
> (Lines 299-314)

Now in his poem " On the Marriage of the King " Warton catalogued for Queen Charlotte's benefit the historical attractions of England:

> Lo! this the land, where Freedom's sacred rage
> Has glow'd untam'd through many a martial age.
> Here patriot Alfred, stain'd with Danish blood,
> Rear'd on one base the king's the people's good:
> Here Henry's archers fram'd the stubborn bow,
> That laid Alanzon's haughty helmet low . . .
> Here Chivalry, stern school of valour old,
> Her noblest feats of knightly fame enroll'd;
> Heroic champions caught the clarion's call,
> And throng'd the feast in Edward's banner'd hall.

In the earlier and greater poet, one notices the absence of localizing details; in Warton, their presence. He writes of the bows of Agincourt, chivalric training, and, subsequently, Druid songs. " cunning Bards at ancient banquets " who " sung of paynim foes defied, and trophies hung," Spenser who " tun'd his mystic minstrelsy, and dress'd in fairy robes a Queen like Thee." Undoubtedly Charlotte would have learned more specific history from Warton's poem than from Pope's. The chief

difference here between Warton's work and Pope's is not in subject matter but in the "ancient manners" that Warton was the first to use so freely. Nor could his contemporaries really contest his claim to originality. Gray did not exploit the same field of history, but confined himself to the more primitive Celtic and Norse fields, barely touching the Elizabethan in his humorous "Long Story." Besides, what in Gray could be described as "Gothic manners?" Moreover, his friends and Warton himself were conscious of the originality of his historical poetry. In 1762 Percy wrote Warton a letter with this important postscript:

> That pleasing cast of antiquity, which distinguished those beautiful poems of yours, in y^e^ late Collection of Oxford Verses, & which gave them so great an advantage over all others, would be finely adapted to such an undertaking; And, let me add, nothing would fix your fame upon a more solid basis, or be more likely to captivate the attention of the public, which seems to loathe all the common forms of poetry; & requires some new species to quicken its pall'd appetite.[73]

To this Warton replied:

> I thank you for thinking me qualified to complete Chaucer's *Squiers Tale*. . . . You are certainly right in thinking that the Public ought to have their Attention called to Poetry in new forms; To Poetry endued with new Manners and new Images.[74]

This, one of Warton's few symptoms of revolt, comes early and precedes the writing of most of his historical verse. Much later, indeed, Warton wrote, in his rather ambiguous fashion, of one of Milton's Latin poems:

> And here, more particularly in displaying the glories of heaven . . . his fancy, to say nothing of the apocalypse, was aided and enriched with descriptions in romance. By the way, this sort of imagery, so much admired in Milton, is much more practicable than many readers seem to suppose.[75]

Is this to be interpreted that Warton was campaigning for the introduction of the imagery of romance, such as he himself

[73] Leah Dennis, "The Text of the Percy-Warton Letters," *PMLA* 46 (1931), 1175. The poem referred to is the one on the king's marriage.

[74] *Ibid.* p. 1176.

[75] *Milton's Minor Poems* (1785), p. 52.

used? Unmentioned by Mant, another aspect of Warton's originality as an antiquarian poet is his defence in the already-quoted " Sonnet written in a blank Leaf of Dugdale's Monasticon " of antiquarianism."

In summation, Warton's literary history is closely connected with his creative work. Both poetry and prose show the same enthusiasm for the past, treat the same periods, reveal the same interests: courtly legend, the Crusades, king rather than peasant and high life rather than low, the poetical and picturesque side of popery, and especially " ancient manners " and architectural remains. His poetry as well as his prose deals with the literary life of the past: the minstrels and Chaucer, Spenser and Shakespeare.

Moreover, Warton's approach to the past is fairly realistic. His insistence on the reality of Spenser's " manners " or of the moving castles of romance is paralleled by his relatively realistic treatment of the past in poetry. Although he did choose to describe the more picturesque, gorgeous, and " romantic " aspect of the past, he wrote of what actually did or could take place in by-gone times. In his verse there are no supernatural transactions as in " Christabel " or eerie transitions as in " The Admiral's Ghost," where Noyes suggests that Nelson was Drake come back to save England. In " The Grave of King Arthur " the supernatural disappearance of Arthur is refuted; a story of normal death and burial is substituted. Fairies, indeed, would have been no anachronism in medieval verse, but Warton keeps his feet on the earth and off fairy ground. Nor does he invent any medieval stories; his " real events " all take place in historic castles. In short, Warton shows very little imaginary, though plenty of imaginative, reconstruction of an actual past.

Finally, Warton's verse and prose both reveal a " medieval conflict." In both he shows that the present is more enlightened and reasonable, less superstitious and primitive than the past, yet he loves withal the religion, manners and literature of by-gone times. It is not for us to psychoanalyse Thomas Warton and decide how or whether he resolved this conflict, or whether he should have done so, but only to record this conflict of enlightened reasonableness with a love of the past as another product of his very acute historic sense.

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